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ABSTRACT

Pointing out that education is clearly one of society's most basic instruments for achieving social conformity, and socialization in the schools is clearly designed to perpetuate the dominant values of the present social system, the author asks whether it does not seem reasonable that those who most precisely articulate these dominant values are very often those who are most extensively educated. If public schooling results in a considerable degree of conformity, what might be expected from the combination of public schooling, college education, and graduate training? Indeed, will not sociologists of education likely be among the most diligent supporters of the prevailing social institutions, as well as their racial values? By discussing school desegregation as an instrument of social policy, the author intends to begin a critical examination of some of the values, assumptions, and questions that underly much of the work of sociologists of education. This paper focuses on three broad areas: (1) the historical relationship between national desegregation policy and social science research; (2) the characteristics of the local school desegregation decision; and (3) the actual utility of research on desegregation. The objectivity and methodology of sociologists of education apparently serve values of which they may be unaware. (Author/JM)

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL POLICY: NOTES TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

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U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Third Annual Sociology of Education Association Conference
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INTRODUCTION

The raison d'etre of our association is advancement of the sociology of education; the theme of our conference is educational reform; and the subject of our session is equal educational opportunity. Thus, there would seem to be no more appropriate occasion to reflect upon an issue that is basic to all three of our interests today: the relationship between social science research and the making of social policy.

The very nature of our interests suggests that we are concerned whether our research brings about improvement in the schools. We necessarily feel that the knowledge we develop may serve some useful purpose and contribute to educational change. Unfortunately, it too seldom has this result. Yet, rather than criticize the policy makers who fail to heed our advice, perhaps it would be more helpful to look at our own role in this situation. Here school desegregation offers an instructive example.

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In fact, by discussing school desegregation as an instrument of social policy, I would like to begin, with you, a critical examination of some of the values, assumptions, and questions that underly much of our work. My remarks, therefore, might well be considered initial notes toward a sociology of the sociology of education.

There are three broad areas, I believe, that immediately warrant our scrutiny: 1) the historical relationship between national desegregation policy and social science research; 2) the characteristics of the local school desegregation decision; and 3) the actual utility of research on desegregation. Let me touch briefly, within the short time available, on each of these areas.

DESEGREGATION POLICY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

In 1857, in the Dred Scott case, the Supreme Court of the United States said that black Americans, then slaves, were "regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in political or social relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."[1] And in 1896, in Plessy v. Ferguson, the Court said that "if one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane."[2] Many scientists during this period were supportive of those decisions, and first slavery and then school segregation were justi-

fied with scientific and educational arguments.[3] Those arguments too often persist today, although perhaps in more sophisticated form.

In 1954, of course, in Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court reversed the Nation's historical public policy on race by stating that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."[4] Yet, that reversal of policy remains tenuous, and there is ample justification for the belief that it represented more the act of a single man, Earl Warren, and a unique Court, than any basic change in national sentiment. Nevertheless, at a time when other governmental voices were silent, the decision gave momentum to the civil rights movement and to what has been termed "the second American revolution."[5] As Archibald Cox suggests, there has been "no problem extending Brown's promise of racial equality throughout the realm of offical actions. Any thought that only schools were affected was soon dissipated."[6]

But James J. Kilpatrick already had identified the emotional roots of school desegregation. In 1957, using terms similar to those in Dred Scott and Plessy, he concluded that white and black cannot come together as equals in any relationship that is intimate, personal, and prolonged. In the public schools, he said, "the relation is keenly intimate--as intimate as two desks touching, as two toilets in a washroom."[7] School desegregation now has moved North, and following on Federal court orders in Detroit, Pontiac, Pasadena,

Denver, and elsewhere, in recent years we have been able to see that racial fear is not a regional problem.

From white parents and politicans, regardless of party affiliation, have come protests and legislation in a continuing attack on "forced busing" and in support of "neighborhood schools." There has been a retreat from desegregation enforcement by Federal authorities,[8] and the Supreme Court, once the Nation's firmest advocate of desegregation, now has restricted remedies for metropolitan segregation and required stringent new evidence of discriminatory intent and practice. The resistance and violence that were not tolerated in Little Rock are neglected or condoned in Boston. There is increasing public expression of support for educational equality, combined with increasing opposition to the only effective means of achieving it. While almost 50 percent of black pupils attend predominantly white schools in the South, this is true of less than 30 percent of black pupils in the North and West--20 years after Brown.

I have referred to desegregation in terms of blacks and whites, but the impact of Brown also has been extended to include other groups that have suffered discrimination. In addition to racial minorities (blacks, American Indians, and Asian Americans), ethnic minorities (Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans) now are also included in the Court's deliberations.[9] It is important to note, for example, that school segregation of Spanish surnamed pupils actually has been increasing in recent years.

But what of social scientists? To what extent, during the past two decades, have we challenged the dominant racial values of American society? The record is meager, and I suggest that it is not particularly exhilarating.

In the first instance, there have been those researchers who have continued to justify the underlying ideology of Dred Scott and Plessy, the ideology of racial superiority and inferiority. This effort did not cease with Brown, and it is documented to a considerable extent.[10] In recent years, in more complex disguises, this work has gained academic respectability, almost in proportion to the growth of Northern opposition to desegregation. Arthur R. Jensen is perhaps most prominent in this regard, although there are others.[11] Without examining the technical quality of this research, however, a basic problem immediately arises: if test scores of limited meaning and disputed value are found to indicate racial differences, as these researchers contend, in what ways would national policy be changed? Directly stated, would we then segregate on the basis of these test scores? Unfortunately, this problem is not limited to researchers of one persuasion.

The Supreme Court, in 1954, incidentally supported the Brown decision with social science research, and many social scientists obviously have been strongly committed to the decision. However, to suggest that such research was the basis for the Court's argument represents a fundamental misunderstanding of Brown. Edmund Cahn has written: "The cruelty of segregation is so obvious that the

Supreme Court could see it and act on it even after reading labored attempts to demonstrate it 'scientifically.'"[12] Robert Coles says: What was right--ethically, philosophically, religiously, humanly--had to prevail. It seemed almost (and literally) blasphemous that the court had to bulwark its decision with all sorts of psychological and sociological testimony."[13]

Yet, for 20 years the belief that school desegregation is required for scientific reasons has persisted and even become dominant among many researchers. However, this is but the corollary of the belief that segregation is required for scientific reasons, and is no less a manifestation of the racial doctrine that has permeated the Nation. Howard Moore, although misinterpreting the Brown decision, makes this point when he protests that Brown was founded on the assumption that whites are superior to blacks and on a "factual showing of demonstrable injury" to black children in segregated schools, thereby making the decision susceptible to reversal if the facts someday are overturned.[14] In other words, if black children in predominantly black schools should someday demonstrate high achievement and positive self-image, this would "scientifically" justify segregation.

Why, then, the inclination among many of our colleagues for research that seeks not only conclusive evidence of measurable achievement gains attributable to desegregation but also suggests that support for desegregation is dependent on such evidence? This is little different from proposing to establish either slavery or freedom as national policy, dependent essentially upon the measurable eco-

nomic consequences of each system. (And, as we recently have been told, slavery did have many economic advantages.)

A response to the generally unexamined value premises of this position, as well as a definition of their historical role, has been forthrightly presented by Federal Judge Simon E. Sobeloff. In dealing with social science testimony arguing that minority children should be placed in majority white schools for educational reasons, Judge Sobeloff said:

> This idea, then, is no more than a resurrection of the axiom of black inferiority as justification for separation of the races, and no less than a return to the spirit of Dred Scott.
>
> The inventors and proponents of this theory grossly misapprehend the philosophical basis for desegregation. It is not founded upon the concept that white children are a precious resource...it is not that black children will be improved by association with their betters. Certainly it is hoped that under integration members of each race will benefit from unfiltered contact with their peers. But school segregation is forbidden simply because its perpetuation is a living insult to the black children and immeasurably taints the education they receive. This is the precise lesson of Brown.... This is no mere issue of expert testimony. It is no mere question of "sociology and educational theory." There have always been those who believed that segregation of the races in the schools was sound educational policy, but since Brown their reasoning has not been permitted to withstand the constitutional command. [15]

There is one more group of social scientists who should be noted briefly before we leave this topic--those who perhaps once were supportive of desegregation but now consider it unattainable or irrelevant. Many are now proponents of what is described as "community control"

in its various manifestations. Their position increasingly has become palatable to a broad spectrum of parents, politicians, and educators who seek a respite from the turmoil of racial confrontation in the name of "quality education." Their position, however, is no less bound by the historical and political constraints I have mentioned. Says Kenneth B. Clark:

> Wh[illegible]gic now exists that will make racially seg[illegible]ed schools effective educational insti[illegible] when the entire history of American re[illegible]orts the Gunnar Myrdal contention t[illegible] segregation in American life can e[illegible]nder conditions of clear inequality? Racially segregated schools attended by blacks are inevitably inferior whether they are imposed by white segregationists or demanded by black separatists. This is true because they exist in a history and in a context of racism and the function of racism is to impose inequality on the lower status groups. In a racist society the lower status minority group does not have and will not be given the ultimate power necessary to control the quality of its alleged "own" institutions. [16]

What I am suggesting in this discussion is that the goals of social policy are the starting point for social research, not its result. Our values determine the focus of our work, rather than the other way around, and a most critical research problem is the extent to which we are aware of this and make our awareness operative. The legal, moral, and human meaning of desegregation, the basis of the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education, thus becomes the springboard for research among those of us who accept the goals underlying that decision.

We do not assume that slavery and segregation, and the racial beliefs that produced them, are erased by one or 10 or 20 years of desegregation. We do not ask whether segregation or desegregation

immediately results in higher achievement test scores. On the contrary, we assume that racial inequality persists and we ask a different question: under what conditions might desegregation most successfully be achieved and consequently create an environment in which racial fear is dissipated and human beings encounter other human beings across the similarities and differences that bind us in one society? Effective learning should be the product of such integration, not its determinant.

THE DESEGREGATION DECISION

Apart from the historical and legal context of school desegregation, there is yet another set of circumstances that suggests that social research follows from social policy rather than the other way around: the characteristics of the desegregation decision by local school board members. This, of course, is an issue relatively neglected by social science research, and our knowledge of the decision making process is consequently also limited. In general, any relationship between social science findings and policy decisions has been largely assumed and seldom studied.

Critical decisions actually appear to depend almost not at all on research, but rather on the values of the decision maker. There is evidence, as well, that facts do not determine values, but rather values determine how the facts will be perceived. This is not unusual if we consider that critical decisions are made under "conditions of uncertainty," which obviously is the case with school desegregation given current political pressures.

> Uncertainty means conditions under which people cannot find a rule to guide their reactions. They cannot easily assimilate their condition to some similar condition in the past, and use this as a precedent for making a plan of action. Sometimes this uncertainty will arise not because no precedent exists, but because there are many precedents, each counselling a different course of action, and all of which to some degree fit the present predicament. Rules by their very nature are general, while situations are particular. [17]

When such a situation occurs, school board members act in much the same way as leaders in other fields. They seek to deny the uniqueness of the situation and apply proven techniques or solutions. However, when minimal adjustments or well-tried plans do not work, an innovative decision is required. Yet, an innovative decision is made only in response to "dire necessity," [18] and even a court order to desegregate may not represent dire necessity in that the board member may vote to appeal the order, vote against specific desegregation plans and force a court-imposed plan, or simply resign. [19] The alternative is to vote on the basis of personal conviction.

It is no wonder that Robert Crain has reported school desegregation to be greatly influenced by the subjective attitudes of board members toward civil rights, their predispostions in this regard, and the personal racial prejudices that they brought with them when they first joined the board. [20] It is no wonder that Robert Stout has reported the "core values" of school board members to be intimately involved in their desegregation behavior, and their commitment to desegregation to be more a statement of faith than of fact. [21] From my own work I know of well educated and articulate board members

who intelligently interpreted the same research in contradictory ways, based on what they wished to find.[22]

If the conditions are indeed uncertain and not subject to firm historical precedents or established principles, then the interpretation of contradictory or ambiguous evidence logically must derive from other sources, most likely "core values." The religious tradition says simply that "the rule of belief follows the rule of prayer," indicating that action based on values precedes the acceptance of fact. And Freud long ago observed a pathological element in some of the behavior that also might be present where racial issues are concerned:

> The idea that a neurotic is suffering from a sort of ignorance, and that if one removes this ignorance by telling him facts...he must recover, is an idea that long has been superseded, and one derived from superficial appearances. The pathological factor is not his ignorance in itself, but the root of this ignorance is his inner resistances; it was they that first called this ignorance into being, and they still maintain it now.[23]

Whether it is adherence to core values in the face of uncertainty or adherence to inner resistances as a manifestion of pathology, the decision maker often seems to shape the research rather than be shaped by it.

How, then, do values and the behavior based on values change? How is a decision under conditions of uncertainty--a school desegregation decision--influenced? It is quite remarkable that so little attention has been paid to these questions.

There are those researchers, of course, who suggest that change in values may not occur at all,[24] and it is true that there are few studies dealing with the effect of changes in thought or emotion on behavior. Further, these few studies actually seem to indicate an absence of relationship.[25] In fact, however, the literature seems to describe only changes in expressed opinion, changes that:

> ...seem to be localized in the region of the lips and do not seem to affect the mind and heart, nor the hands and feet.... It is a literature which, in the main, seems concerned with momentary modifications in the expression of opinions and not with enduring changes of beliefs, attitudes, or values.[26]

There is at least tentative evidence, apart from personal experience, to suggest that value shifts in connection with desegregation decisions do take place,[27] and the assumption that such shifts are possible would seem to be a necessary assumption of policy research.

If research does not now influence policy decisions, then a basic question of research presumably would relate to the conditions under which influence would occur. This, in turn, suggests research on the decision making process and those aspects of human behavior that determine value choices and consequent policy decisions. These issues certainly do not lend themselves to simple designs or methodologies, but they do suggest that their results are unlikely to be trivial.

RESEARCH ON DESEGREGATION

The usefulness of much research on desegregation actually seems to be limited by its own methodological eccentricity: theory has

been virtually abandoned, empiricism and objectivity have been too soon defined as quantification and exactness, and reality has been conformed to technique rather than the other way around. The result is a substantial absence of important findings.

Some of this research, for example, centers on measurable achievement gains. Apart from the previously noted problems of this emphasis, there is little indication that it has isolated any significant variable. A recent review of the literature concludes clearly that no changes in school resources, processes, organization, or funding consistently and unambiguously make a difference.[28] It is not that "nothing works," as this review points out, but rather that our research has found nothing that works. Even if there were to be a direct translation of research into policy, in other words, research would have nothing to say. (Educational research, of course, is not unique in this respect. How much consistent and unambiguous knowledge do we have about psychotherapy, crime and delinquency, or even inflation and recession?)

To a considerable extent this problem may be a simple result of the complexities of human behavior and social organization, but to a considerable extent it also may be the result of our contemporary research tastes. While our lack of knowledge very often gives rise to the argument that social science is still in its infancy or that the size of prior studies simply has been too small, a more critical view might lead to different conclusions.

Occasionally sensitive and perceptive case studies, rich in detail, join with personal experience to provide a most significant source of the social scientists' conventional wisdom regarding the process of desegregation.[29] Nevertheless, case study seldom has been carried beyond the level of descriptive journalistic reporting, and the accumulation of descriptions has yet to justify more than the most rudimentary models of the politics of desegregation, interracial interaction, and effective learning--and even these rudimentary models are rare. This failure to develop useful generalizations is perhaps more critical than the inherent problems in case study methodology: access to reliable, honest, and insightful informants; definition and selection of data; validation; and the like.

However, the dominant mode of desegregation research (and of social science research generally) is not case study but the use of statistical correlation, which is increasingly tied to survey instruments. Presumably a means of verification, correlational procedures now have become almost ends in themselves. No matter how sophisticated the procedures may be, the underlying assumptions are the same: reality consists of discrete behavioral inputs and outcomes; these inputs and outcomes are susceptible to categorization, identification, and quantification, generally through the use of multiple-choice questionnaires; correlations among the inputs and outcomes actually describe causal relationships in society; a well-defined theory need not determine the methodology, but rather the use of the methodology will determine a theory.

The basic intent of this approach obviously is commendable, seeking as it does a degree of scope, objectivity, and validity that are unavailable through case study techniques. Yet, it begins with a distorted vision of scientific discovery and human behavior. It unhistorically assumes that laws of nature are uncovered simply through the statistical association of what, without a well-defined theory, are virtually random facts; and further, that the most complex aspects of social life may be defined in terms appropriate to this assumption. (This is the social science equivalent of suggesting that 1,000 monkeys sitting at 1,000 typewriters for 1,000 years might produce the works of Shakespeare.) It often suggests that survey instruments realistically and usefully portray these complex aspects of social life and that the mathematical relationships between questionnaire responses carry a real-life "meaning."

(Abraham Kaplan, among others, has discussed the problems in this approach, noting especially the misplaced emphasis on exactness at the expense of intersubjectivity: "Do you see what I see?" Kaplan, of course, discovered "the law of the instrument" in connection with the use of quantification: "Give a small boy a hammer and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding." [30])

Needless to say, I am not suggesting that measurement <u>per se</u> is inappropriate to the social sciences. However, in an area of such complex human motivations and involvements as school desegregation, and in similar areas, measurement obviously must follow only on

carefully conceptualized experience and on well-conceived and well-founded theory. There must be realistic and meaningful units of measurement that are capable of capture in the investigatory net and that have a logical relationship to each other. Unfortunately, this is not often the situation, and empiricism, which formerly denoted knowledge based on experience, observation, and experimentation, has come to mean knowledge based on quantification regardless of its validity.

In desegregation research this preoccupation with quantification and survey methods in the absence of appropriate theory has resulted in an emphasis on the schools as they function (or malfunction) under existing conditions, on inputs and outcomes rather than the intervening personal and social contexts and processes, and on trivial findings. In our conventional wisdom, for example, we "know" that all children of minimal intelligence can learn to read well in a relatively short period of time, although not necessarily at the same age. What are we to do, then, with research that finds "statistically significant" reading gains of 1.3 years for 1.0 years of schooling among a specific group of pupils who were below grade level to begin with but then were placed in a school with a specific racial or ethnic enrollment. How does such "statistical significance" bear on the knowledge required for policy decisions, given our conventional wisdom?

In fact, whether the subject is effective learning or the politics of desegregation, a substantial amount of social science investigation

actually represents but an evaluation of limited aspects of a designated school or school system rather than research into the possibilities of education. (I understand evaluation to mean concern with the effectiveness of an existing practice and research to mean concern with basic principles of growth and change.) Although this evaluative emphasis may be due in part to present funding biases, social scientists certainly should be discouraged by the disregard the conclusions from this work actually receive from policy makers. (How many studies actually have resulted, directly or indirectly, in policy decisions?) This is to say nothing of the probability that such work is unlikely, intrinsically, to produce the knowledge on which policy might be based.

Finally, one further aspect of desegregation research should be noted: the emphasis on abstract explanations, teacher-free or person-free variables, a deus ex machina in the political and educational process. We often have labored on the assumption that in this most emotional arena of social life, we can find solutions that are independent of the persons who implement them, involve no trade-offs in economic or political values, and lead to desired results with relatively mechanical and inexpensive application. A complex organism has been viewed as a black box.

What I am suggesting in this discussion is not the abandonment of social science but a more logical, realistic, and even "empirical" application of it. This would lead to more intensive examination of the experience we already have available so that theories and models,

in turn, might lead to a greater emphasis on unmeasurable similarities, anthropological and other observational techniques, the study of leadership and instructional styles, process variables, and the more sophisticated application of measurement to carefully selected categories before it is applied to relationships among them.

Even after all of this, a considerable modesty in our expectations and conclusions would be helpful.

CONCLUSION

Education is clearly one of society's most basic instruments for achieving social conformity, and socialization in the schools is clearly designed to perpetuate the dominant values of the present social system.[31] Does it not seem reasonable, then, that those who most precisely articulate these dominant values are very often those who are most extensively educated? If public schooling results in a considerable degree of conformity, what might be expected from the combination of public schooling, college education, and graduate training? Indeed, will not sociologists of education likely be among the most diligent supporters of the prevailing social institutions, as well as their racial values?

I have put this argument in a rather extreme and unsubtle form, as I have much of the discussion in this paper. Yet, in great measure it appears true, and the essential requirement in the sociology of education is not for more "objectivity" as it is presently

defined. On the contrary, we need to examine the ways in which our objectivity, including our methodology, serves values of which we may be unaware. Before we are able to reform the schools, it may be necessary to reform ourselves.

School desegregation remains the touchstone of racial equality in the United States. Separate remains unequal. However, racial equality and school desegregation have reflected national policy for only 20 years, and even now this policy remains peripheral, tenuous, and under continual attack. As desegregation moves North, and no longer represents a regional problem peculiar to the South, it becomes increasingly vulnerable. Every aspect of school desegregation, including research on desegregation, consequently becomes a political issue, a question of racial and social values.

If values represent the starting point for social science research, a significant function of research is then to suggest alternative programs for implementing these values. If social policy is little affected by research, a critical task of research is then to explore the decision making process. If the findings of research are ambiguous, contradictory, and of limited use, changes in emphasis and methodology would then seem logical.

However, social science has been preoccupied with <u>what is</u>, rather than <u>what can be</u> or <u>what should be</u>. It has been preoccupied with impersonal causal forces rather than the context of moral judgments and motives. It has been preoccupied with levels of generality and conceptual abstraction that cannot be applied to real-life situations.[32]

These problems, which have been discussed in relation to school desegregation, perhaps simply indicate the extent to which social science itself is bound by the institutions it seeks to change.

Social science is very often an expensive undertaking, largely dependent on its funding sources, while even more limited research frequently emulates its "bureaucratic" counterpart. Social science findings are seldom the innocent product of disinterested research, and social scientists are unaccountable to any mythical scientific "community." The reality that the social scientist defines and counts is never the same reality as that of the mathematician and physical scientist. The techniques of social science generally are applied in a context of social conflict, and decisions of research focus and data selection always have social consequences.[33]

Where, in any of this, is our work free of racial, political, and social meaning? Nowhere, of course, and this simply means that we are free to determine the sociology of the sociology of education for ourselves.

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30. Abraham Kaplan, The Conduct of Inquiry (San Francisco: Chandler, 1964), p. 28. Also see Aaron Cicourel, Method and Measurement in Sociology (New York: The Free Press, 1964), for an excellent discussion of the difficulties in survey research.

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33. Sheldon S. Wolin, "Looking for 'Reality'," The New York Reveiw of Books, February 6, 1975, offers on excellent presentation of this viewpoint, particulary in connection with survey research.